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RUEHLB/AMEMBASSY BEIRUT 4717
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RUEHRH/AMEMBASSY RIYADH 7846
RUEHTV/AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV 1950
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DEPARTMENT FOR PA, NEA/ARN, INR/IC/CD, INR/R/MR:STHIBEAULT AND
JMCCARTER, VOA NEWS CA, NEA/PPD:CBOURGEOIS, AZAIBACK, AND
AFERNANDEZ, IIP/G/NEA-SA MDAVIDSON
WHITE HOUSE FOR NSC
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TAGS: KMDR PREL KPAO OPRC SY

SUBJECT: Syria/India, Britain, Italy, Lebanon, Iraq, Peace Conference (8/14)

¶1. Summary: Syrian papers on August 14 reported the visit to India by FM Mouallem on August 13. Mouallem conferred with Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh who praised President Asad saying that "Syria has achieved remarkable progress (which) showed wisdom in dealing with the developments of the region." Singh's talks with FM Mouallem touched upon bilateral relations and regional issues, particularly in Palestine, Lebanon and Iraq. FM Mouallem also held official talks with his Indian FM Pranab Mokherjee on bilateral relations between Syria and India and means of enhancing them in the interest of both countries. The two ministers also discussed the latest developments in the Middle East and Indian Peninsula. FM Mouallem briefed his Indian counterpart on what he called the positive Syrian role to achieve security and stability in the region through urging Palestinians to return back to dialogue and form a national unity government, support concordance among the Lebanese and realize national reconciliation in Iraq.

Papers also reported that Italian Prime Minister Romano Prodi has reiterated the importance of the role played by Syria in the Middle East under the leadership of President Asad. In a speech on August 13 to an international youth meeting on the international policy in the Italian city of Grosseto, Prodi said that "peace in the Middle East will not be achieved without the participation of Syria as part of the peace process." "The Middle East crisis requires collective commitment for being a world crisis and the peace process can't succeed unless it includes all parties along with the Arab countries, the EU, China, Russia and the US," Prodi concluded.

On the Lebanese issue, all papers headlined a speech by Lebanese Army Commander Michel Suleiman on August 13 during a meeting with Lebanese officers stressing that the "Fatah al-Islam" organization is linked to al-Qaeda, adding that the "Syrian security apparatus has no relation to it".

All papers featured a report prepared by the Foreign Affairs committee at the British House of Commons calling on the British government to develop relations with Syria, which plays a major role in the region's key issues. Al-Jazeera Satellite TV Channel on August 13 quoted the report as saying "British foreign policy has harmed the country's reputation and credibility in the Arab and Islamic worlds," calling for direct contacts not only with Hamas but with Hezbollah through its MPs in the Lebanese parliament. The

report also expected the failure of US strategy concerning increasing the number of US and British forces in Iraq. Al-Jazeera Clarified that the report goes in the direction of strengthening efforts to press the British government to withdraw forces from Iraq, pointing out that the change is required by British Prime Minister Gordon Brown not only in Iraq but in other places.

End of summary.

12. Selected Headlines:

Vice-President Al-Shara meets journalists today.

"Foreign Minister Mouallem confers with Indian Prime Minister Singh, his Indian FM Mokherjee and the Indian Minister of Trade and Industry in New Delhi. Mouallem confirms to the Lebanese satellite TV Channel NBN: America pursues illusion. The arms race does not serve peace" (Government-owned Al-Thawra, 8/14)

"Indian Prime Minister Singh hails the wisdom of President Asad and Syrian reforms" (Government-owned Al-Ba'th, 8/14)

"A British report calls for the restoration of credibility to Britain's policy. The report calls on the government of British Prime Minister Gordon Brown to develop its relations with Syria" (Government-owned Tishreen, 8/14)

"Lebanese warnings against the US role in prolonging the Lebanese crisis continue. Lebanese Army Commander Michel Suleiman: The 'Fatah al-Islam' organization is linked to al-Qaeda, and Syria has no connection with it" (Government-owned Tishreen, 8/14)

"Israel arrests Hamas supporters in occupied Jerusalem"
(Government-owned Tishreen, 8/14)

13. Editorial Block Quotes:

"Peace of False Promises"

Muhammad Khayr al-Jammali, a commentator in government-owned Al-Thawra, wrote (8/14): "The Middle East peace for which President Bush is calling is based on false claims meant to mislead Arabs and cover for the successive American failures in Iraq and Lebanon...."

"Washington seeks to achieve a distorted settlement of the conflict between Israel and Palestinians and create a rift in Arab and Palestinian ranks by dividing Arabs into moderates and extremists."

"Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak said that Israel will not withdraw from the West Bank before at least five years.... This proves the misleading talk about peace by American and Israeli leaders...."

"Barak's statements show the true Israeli thinking about peace, which the Bush administration cannot disregard or change...."

"A Peace Conference or Another Oslo?"

Khurshid Dalli, a commentator in independent al-Watan, wrote (8/14: "Israel is the biggest winner from the Middle East peace conference that President Bush called for later this year.

"For Israel, the conference will be a second Oslo, producing a state with no sovereignty, real capital, or specific geographic border...."

"The conference will also deepen Palestinian differences and pave the way to normalize relations between Arabs and Israel. For the United States, the conference will divert attention from what is

happening in Iraq and get the so-called moderate Arab countries involved in the American strategy against Iran...."

"What Kind of Victory Is This?"

Izz-al-Din al-Darwish, an editorialist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (8/14): "President Bush tries to inflate marginal things that take place in Iraq and present them to Americans as major victories.... An example of this is Bush's talk in his recent radio address about the killing of an Al-Qaeda leader in Iraq, which he described as a victory for free Iraq....

"Iraq was completely free from Al-Qaeda and any other terrorist organization when it was occupied. The terrorists about whom Bush constantly talks and from whom he promises to free Iraq would not have arrived in Iraq and tampered with its security had it not been for the American occupation of the country. In other words, terrorism in Iraq is one of the results of the US occupation....

"President Bush also remarked in the same radio address that American forces have killed and arrested 1,500 terrorists since the beginning of the year. Many of these are innocent Iraqis.... When Bush says that his troops killed and arrested 1,500 people in Iraq since the beginning of the year, this is an open admission that the American Army is involved in the killing of Iraqis.... The Bush administration is directly responsible for the killing of about one million Iraqis since the invasion....

"Based on these facts, President Bush cannot convince Iraqis or Americans that he has achieved victory in Iraq. He cannot even cover his failures in this country, which is almost turning into rubble and which is losing dozens of its people every day as a result of the occupation and Bush's insistence on achieving victory. So what kind of victory is this?"

"Seeking a Solution or a Partner in Failure?"

Charles Kamilah, a columnist in government-owned Tishreen, wrote (8/14): "President Bush gave the United Nations an expanded role in Iraq not because he recognizes the importance and role of the international organization or because he seeks a solution to the Iraqi problem, but because he is searching for a solution to the aggravating crisis of the occupation....

"Bush wants to perpetuate occupation with international supervision covering the cost of the occupation and the repercussions of its failure....

"Everyone wants the United Nations to play a role in Iraq, but concurrently with US withdrawal or ending occupation."

Corbin